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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#) [ISLAMISTS](#)  
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: IMPLICATIONS OF ISLAMIST GAINS IN  
KUWAITI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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FRIEND: SUPPORT FOR AND OPPOSITION TO  
REFORM UNITES POLITICAL OPPOSITES  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2150 - FREEDOM AGENDA: GRASSROOTS REFORM  
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MOVEMENT  
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 2148 - FREEDOM AGENDA AND JUNE 29  
ELECTIONS: PROGRESS ON REFORM DEFINED BY  
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VIEWS ON ELECTORAL REFORM IRAQ AND IRAN  
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[1](#)G. 05 KUWAIT 4993 - FREEDOM AGENDA: NOW SHOWING AT  
EMBASSY KUWAIT: USING FILM TO PROMOTE  
DEMOCRATIC AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Matthew H. Tueller  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: There is a strong possibility that the  
Kuwaiti Parliament elected on June 29 will include more  
Islamist members than the previous one. Islamists are  
well-organized and poised to capitalize on the women's vote.  
While there are legitimate concerns about the impact this  
would have on U.S. interests, a more Islamist Parliament  
should not be viewed as a major setback for our Freedom  
Agenda. First, Islamists are unlikely to gain a majority in  
Parliament (33 seats), without which they will be unable to  
advance their conservative social agenda. With its 16  
Ministers and strong bloc of pro-Government MPs, the  
Government will still be able to control what legislation is  
approved by Parliament. Second, although they generally  
cooperate in Parliament and during elections, Kuwaiti  
Islamists are not a monolithic bloc. Even if more Islamist  
MPs are elected, there are important differences between  
Islamist groups in Kuwait; some are far less hostile to U.S.  
interests than others. Third, the election of more Islamist  
MPs could increase the chance for political reform in Kuwait.  
Islamists in the now dissolved Parliament strongly supported  
electoral reform and are likely to continue pushing for a  
reduction to five constituencies in the next Parliament.  
Without Islamist support, this and other important political  
reforms have little chance of being implemented. End summary.

Increase in Islamist MPs Likely  
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[1](#)2. (S/NF) There are several reasons to believe that there  
will be more Islamist members in the next Parliament. First,

Islamists are poised to benefit most from the participation of women in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Islamists are well-organized and enjoy the support of a strong, conservative base whose female members are likely to vote for male Islamist candidates. Second, Islamist MPs in the previous Parliament were quick to join liberal MPs in supporting electoral reform. Islamist candidates are likely to capitalize on their support for reform to attract more moderate voters (ref A). Third, regional events have contributed to a growing conservatism in Kuwaiti society, leading some Kuwaitis to support Islamist candidates whom they believe will protect Kuwait's conservative culture. Finally, the short campaign period benefits Islamists who are better organized and better funded than other political groups.

¶3. (S/NF) According to Post's rough estimate, out of the 96 candidates who have a good chance of being elected to the 50 open seats, 41 are Islamists or supported by Islamists, including two Shi'a Islamist candidates; 40 are Government-leaning; 8 are liberal; and 7 are independents. (Note: There were 15 Sunni Islamist MPs in the recently-dissolved Parliament. End note.) Although there are differences between Islamist candidates, Islamist groups are pooling their resources in an effort to increase overall Islamist representation in Parliament. The 56 candidates believed to genuinely support political reform include all 41 of the Islamists from our short-list of strongest candidates.

#### The Spectrum of Islamists in Kuwait

¶4. (S/NF) Though they often cooperate in Parliament and

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during elections, Kuwaiti Islamists are not a monolithic bloc. There is a great degree of variety between Kuwait's different Islamist groups, whose political ideologies range from pragmatic and open, to extremist and vehemently anti-American. (Note: For a brief overview of Kuwait's Islamist, Shi'a, and liberal political blocs, see our classified website: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>. End note.) The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, is one of the most vocal advocates of political reform in Kuwait and strongly supported recent proposals to reduce the number of electoral constituencies, seen as crucial to limiting electoral corruption (refs D and E). The two ICM MPs in the recently-dissolved Parliament also set a precedent in January by disclosing their financial records, an example no other MP followed. Other Islamist groups, like the Salafi Movement and the Ummah (Nation's) Party, similarly support political reform, which they believe will increase their political influence. In the previous Parliament, Islamist MPs cooperated through the 14-member Islamic Bloc, which showed some signs of division earlier in the year.

¶5. (S/NF) The main difference between Kuwaiti Islamist groups is in how pragmatic they are in pursuing their objectives and the degree of animosity they have against the West. Salafis are generally uncompromising in their policies and strongly anti-American or anti-Western in their rhetoric, though in private meetings some can be friendly and engaging while differing with U.S. policies. The ICM, on the other hand, is extremely pragmatic and, while critical of U.S. policies, supportive of a dialogue with the U.S. on regional issues. Despite their criticisms, few Kuwaiti Islamists actively advocate the departure of U.S. troops from Kuwait or Iraq. Indeed, Kuwaiti Islamists often have to justify their toleration, and even support, for the extensive U.S. presence in the country to their regional counterparts. In addition, many tribal candidates with conservative leanings are supported by Islamist groups, but are ultimately beholden to their tribes rather than a pan-Islamist ideology. When analyzing the results of the elections, therefore, a

distinction should be made between the Islamist MPs elected: the election of more Salafis could be seen as a setback for our freedom agenda, whereas the election of more pragmatic Islamists, like ICM members, would be less worrisome to U.S. security and strategic interests.

#### Issues of Concern

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¶6. (S/NF) The one issue almost all Kuwaiti Islamists agree on is the need to fully "Islamize" Kuwaiti legislation by amending Article 2 of the constitution to make Islamic Shari'a "the source of legislation," rather than "a main source." In order to amend the constitution, however, Islamists would need the support of 44 out of the 65 members of Parliament. With the Government controlling 16 of these seats, obtaining the necessary two-thirds majority would be practically impossible. (Note: The Prime Minister is required to appoint one elected MP as a Minister, meaning there are always 49 elected MPs and 16 Government Ministers, who serve as ex officio MPs, in Parliament. End note.) In addition, the Amir retains the right to exercise his constitutional right to dissolve Parliament and call new elections if the Islamists push this issue, which is unlikely.

¶7. (S/NF) The greater concern is that Islamist MPs would push a conservative social agenda and/or block important legislation, like the \$500 million pledged by the Kuwaiti government to aid victims of hurricane Katrina. Islamist MPs could also obstruct passage of a U.S.-Kuwait free trade agreement that included a provision requiring Kuwait to end its economic boycott of Israel. In addition, Islamists might advocate increasing Kuwaiti assistance to the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority, revising Kuwait's educational curricula to bring it more in line with their conservative values, or introduce other legislation inimical to U.S. interests. One must keep in mind, however, that Islamists are unlikely to win a majority in Parliament (33 seats) and that the Government is still likely to have a clear majority capable of blocking conservative social legislation and passing legislation it supports. It is also important to note that Kuwaiti parliamentarians have an extremely limited ability to shape foreign policy, which is considered the sole purview of the Government. If anything, the Islamists are likely to be just a vocal opposition, but not a real threat to the Government.

#### No Political Reform Without Islamists

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¶8. (S/NF) Ironically, the election of more Islamist MPs could increase the chance for political reform in Kuwait. All 14 members of the Islamic Bloc in the previous Parliament were also part of the 29 MP "orange" bloc whose insistence on grilling the Prime Minister unless the Government adopted five constituencies led the Amir to dissolve Parliament. Since the number of liberal and truly independent MPs is likely to remain unchanged or even decline, the greatest chance for the number of pro-reform MPs to increase is for more Islamist candidates to be elected. This explains some liberals' support for Islamists despite their ideological differences (ref A). On the other hand, some liberal contacts question Islamists' sincerity (ref C), arguing that Islamists' support for political reform is based purely on the calculation that it will increase their political power. Unfortunately, this may be true; but without Islamist support, these reforms are not likely to be implemented in the first place.

#### Next Steps

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¶9. (S/NF) Post will continue to attend the election diwanis of candidates from all political backgrounds,

paying close attention to the rhetoric and support of Islamist candidates and noting any significant differences between them. We will also continue to seek constructive ways to engage Islamists through events like American diwanias (ref F) and movie nights (ref G), as well as occasionally nominating moderate Islamists for IVP or MEPI-funded programs focusing on political reform, as suggested in post's report on the ICM (refs D and E). In reporting on the influence of Islamists in Kuwait, we will focus on analyzing both the similarities and differences between Kuwaiti Islamist groups, the alliances that emerge between them, and any potential threats to U.S. interests that emerge from their increased representation in Parliament.

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